

Overcoming Conflicts in Africa: Impact on World Peace

by

Salim Ahmed Salim

President, The Julius K. Nyerere Foundation

Former Prime Minister of Tanzania

Former Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity

Salim Ahmed Salim is President of the Julius K. Nyerere Foundation. He studied at Lumumba College in Zanzibar, pursued undergraduate studies (1965-1968) at St. Stephen's College of the University of Delhi (India), and in 1975 obtained a masters degree in International Affairs from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University in New York. He holds seven honorary doctorates, a Doctor of Laws from the University of Philippines at Los Baños (1980), a Doctor of Humanities from the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria (1983), a Doctor of Civil Law from the University of Mauritius (1991), a Doctor of Arts in International Affairs from the University of Khartoum, Sudan (1995), a Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations from the University of Bologna, Italy (1996), a Doctor of Laws from the University of Cape Town, South Africa (1998), and a Doctor of Laws from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia (2003). And notwithstanding, his other notable honors and decorations include: The Star of Africa (Liberia, 1980), The Order of the United Republic of Tanzania – Nishani Ya Jamhuri Ya Muungano Wa Tanzania, 1985, The Order of Mille Collines (Rwanda, 1993), Grande Croix de l'Ordre Congolais du Dévouement (Republic of Congo, 1994), Grand Officier de l'Ordre du Mérite (Central African Republic, 1994), The Medal of Africa (Libya, 9.9.99), Grand Officier de l'Ordre National du Lion (Sénégal, 2000), The Order of the Two Niles (Sudan, 2001), Ordre El-Athir (Algeria, 2001), Ordre du Mono (Togo, 2001), The Commandant de l'Ordre National (Mali, 2001), and the Order of the Supreme Companions of Oliver R. Tambo -Gold (South Africa, 2004).

The Honorable Salim Ahmed Salim has served as Chief Editor of a Zanzibar daily paper, Deputy Chief Representative of the Zanzibar Office based in Havana, Cuba 1961-1962, Secretary General of the All-Zanzibar Journalists Organization 1963-1964, Tanzania Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt 1964-1965, Tanzanian High Commissioner to India 1965-1968, Tanzania Ambassador to the People's Republic of China 1969-1970, Tanzania Ambassador to the United Nations 1970-1980, Tanzania Ambassador to Cuba 1970-1980 (served while at the UN), Tanzanian High Commissioner to Guyana, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago 1970-1980 (served while at the UN), Minister for Foreign Affairs 1980-1984, Prime Minister of Tanzania 1984-1985, Deputy Prime Minister of Tanzania 1986-1989, Minister for Defense and National Service 1986-1989, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity 1989-2001, and the African Union Special Envoy on the Darfur Conflict 2004-2008.

The following is the keynote address of The Honorable Salim Ahmed Salim, presented at the 2008 *Global Peace Leadership Summit* sponsored by The African Diaspora Foundation, held at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), September 26 at the Tom Bradely International Hall.

Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed an honour for me to join you this morning. I wish to convey sincere gratitude to the leadership of the African Diaspora Foundation for the gracious invitation, and for giving me the opportunity of addressing this forum. I pay tribute to the founders of this initiative which in itself underscores a profound sense of identity as Africans, and people of African descent; and an affirmation of responsibility and commitment as world citizens.

The identity of 'Diaspora' is not simply a sociological category of people who have left or forced of their homeland and spread across the world. In its deeper sense, of which I strongly discern in this

African Diaspora Foundation (ADF) initiative, it is a quest to forge a unity among a people by linking their shared past, their present and their common destiny. It is an endeavour to galvanize a collective being beyond space, across time and horizon in order to empower and transform.

The binding link of a Diaspora is the sharing of values and norms and the awareness of having a common destiny. Yours is a powerful positive force operating at a global level. Being in the United States of America, and other parts of the world I believe you are fully cognizant of the influence and dynamism of similar Diasporas in the pursuit of their own agenda.

I also cherish the vision of your Foundation – the pursuit of peace, non-violence and reconciliation in Africa, and in the world at large. Indeed, there can be no more noble a cause than this. As you have so articulately underlined, peace is the foundation for humanity to realize its highest essence. It is the basis of advances in knowledge, culture, prosperity, mutual relations, and development as a whole. Nations have thrived and flourished, human welfare has attained high levels, whenever peace has prevailed. And when it has proved elusive, humanity has suffered, and even empires have crumbled, and a retrogression has been the outcome.

I urge you to continue on your path for peace. It is a challenging road, but the results are rewarding to you as individuals, to your respective regions, and to humankind as a whole. In reality you are heeding a call of those who have lost their lives in brutal violence, in wars and genocides; of those who are refugees totally denied the right to enjoy normal living in places of their belonging; and of the many people who are internally displaced. Your mission, your vision, resonates with their aspirations.

Chairperson,

You have invited me to share with you my reflections on the dynamic of overcoming conflicts in Africa, and its impact on world peace. It cannot be denied that the phenomenon of conflict has been one of the most recalcitrant challenges confronting Africa in the past 50 years of independence. The murder of Patrice Lumumba in January 1961 and the predicament of the Congo since then epitomize the trials and tribulations of Africa as faced by the demon of conflict. A couple of years after Lumumba's murder President Sylvanus Olympio of Togo was assassinated and his Government toppled. What followed was more or less a reassertion of a culture of violence and force into the political culture of a newly emerging independent Africa.

Indeed, the first decade of African independence was marred by a succession of coups and counter-coups. The phenomenon of the military strong man became almost fashionable, when not only Generals could instigate takeovers, but it went down even to sergeant majors. The tragedy of those two decades when coups became an expected vehicle of regime change was that it undermined the healthy growth of democratic institutions for the newly emerging countries.

As some of you may recall, this was also a period of a monopoly of politics through single parties, a situation that was rationalized by the need to have institutional mechanisms that foster national unity and integration. At the same time, at a global level, Africa was caught up in the bipolar context of East-West power contest. Within such a context, Africa found itself to be a theatre in the all-embracing spheres of influence.

For the culture of that time, and with coup de tats being the dominant mode of instability in the Continent, the response of the international community was more or less muted. Largely bilateral, limited mainly to conferring or withholding recognition of the different military regimes depending on which global power camp they aligned themselves. Nevertheless, when considered in comparative terms, the instability of this first decade involving mainly regime change was essentially a low intensity conflict mode.

Apart from the Nigerian civil war, coup de tats were mostly confined to the barracks and linked up to a few business and political elites. On the other hand, the institutional damage that the instability engendered was quite profound. It eroded the foundations of democracy by undermining the checks and balances among structures of governance, granting a higher prominence to the military – with its monopoly of the instruments of violence. I believe that the inability of African institutions of governance to transform ‘naturally’ has been a great cost – and a major contributory factor for subsequent instability in the continent.

Perhaps the effects of that early instability was not very visible because the Continent was more preoccupied in dealing with the vestiges of moribund colonialism and apartheid in Southern Africa. Sadly, it was the very aftermaths of the decolonization process that presented the most severe challenge for sustainable peace and security in our Continent. It led to the emergence of the phenomenon of armed rebel movements which in most cases fractured young nation states, and tearing down their social fabric.

By the late 1970s, and the proliferation of armed movements, conflict had pervaded society. And by being anchored in society it became more vicious and devastating. The tragedy of that degeneration was the convenience of deploying tools of mobilizing society which include factors such as ethnicity, regionalism and even class. As was the case with the coups of the first decade, and despite the increased incidence of rebel movements, initiatives for mediation and reconciliation were undertaken cautiously and more or less in an ad-hoc manner.

More often than not, African leaders felt duty bound by the Continental organisation’s rule on non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Even when conflicts caused suffering and misery to the people, they were still considered to be internal affairs of the countries concerned. The fact that the founding fathers of the Organisation of African Unity could not have intended this to be the case is besides the point.

As we look back into that early period and objectively examine the factors that triggered the proliferation of conflicts; and the maiming and killing of a brother by a brother; destruction of resources and property; ruining the welfare of our people; and damaging our development potential – what do we see as the underlying factors?

Internally, we do see a fragility of institutions of governance which led to exclusion and alienation of some members of society. And we also see the absence of institutions that are robust enough to accommodate a smooth process of political contestation and succession. In many of those countries that experienced tension the institutions could not provide for political accommodation and resolution without upheavals.

As earlier intimated, the external environment also played a major role in causing and exacerbating conflicts in Africa. As super-powers competed to gain allies and areas of influence, the Continent found itself almost dismembered as proxy wars were fought in our soils. As different factions were armed by different powers Africa became part of the global battle ground where battle of dominance was fought. And in the earlier period, there was also no innocence in the manner independence was granted to some of our countries. Embedded in the handover was almost a deliberate move to weaken the post-independence regimes.

Distinguished participants, two related developments occurred in the 1990s. This is the decade when conflict in Africa reached its peak. Not only did we witness the most horrendous acts against humanity, but this was also the decade when what some commentators described as Africa's Third World War took place. It was also a period when we witnessed the phenomenon of collapsed state in Africa.

For us as Africans, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, represented our lowest moment. It was an indictment on us as well as the entire international community. It epitomized humanity at its worst when for 100 days, not only internal political and social institutions failed to protect, but in most cases even facilitated the systematic murdering of close to a million innocent civilians. While this was happening the international community stood by and watched without taking any action. More than in any other tragedy, the Rwanda genocide underscores the collective guilt and responsibility that we all bear in ensuring peace and security, not simply of governments and borders, but of the people.

As the then Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity, under a directive of the African Heads of State and Government, I appointed an International Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and the Surrounding Events. The panel was chaired by the former President of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire. The title of their final report captures the tragedy that took place, and the implications for all of us as Africans, and especially as leaders. They called it – *The Preventable Genocide* – indicating that there were steps that could have been taken before and immediately, when it started that could have arrested that terrible massacre.

In the report, the eminent personalities observe, and I quote:

If there is anything worse than the genocide itself, it is the knowledge that it did not have to happen. The simple, harsh, truth is that the genocide was not inevitable; and that it would have been relatively easy to stop it from happening prior to April 6, 1994, and then to mitigate the destruction significantly once it began. In the words of one expert, “This was the most easily preventable genocide imaginable.”

The case of Somalia defies every classical text book theory of national integration. All the internal sociological conditions for unity were ever present, and yet the nation imploded. There was no issue of ethnicity or religion. Language is common, and inequity was not as bad as in many other parts. Still Somalia fragmented to the lowest common bond – the clan and even sub-clan. And for two decades now, it has proved difficult to bring it back to sustainable peace and security.

There is also the case of the Congo whose capital is Kinshasa, a country full of riches and natural endowments, and yet its people have never had peace and tranquility to fully enjoy those blessings. And by the end of the 1990s a number of countries were involved in a devastating war that beleaguered the country, costing lives and property, and bringing lots of misery to the Congolese people.

The tragedy of Darfur is in all our minds and hearts. There, in Sudan, Africa’s largest country lies all that should be the pride of Africa – massive land, resilient people, richness in diversity, rich history, and wealth of resources. Sadly for yet another time, Darfur represents a symbol of our collective guilt, not only as Africans, but as members of humankind as a whole. The western Sudan region of Darfur is located in Africa, it embodies the suffering of African people, but it beseeches and speaks to the world community, yet it critiques globalization, mocks at hypocrisy, and challenges global governance. Indeed, it challenges us all.

Let me at this juncture highlight the second development that occurred in the 1990s. This relates to Africa committing itself to taking collective responsibility in fostering and sustaining peace and security in the Continent.

I was privileged to be the Secretary General of the Continental Organisation, at that time called the Organisation of African Unity. Together with the Heads of State and Government, we took stock of the implications of the global turn of events of the early 1990s, and acknowledged a new dispensation evolving in the international arena. It was recognized that the coming down of the Berlin Wall and the shifting polarity in power politics as well as the free flow of goods and capital ushered in a new constellation of forces with new patterns of global relations. New opportunities were evolving that required a re-positioning of our Continent.

The first undertaking was to reinvigorate the establishment of a new architecture for peace, security and development in the Continent. The immediate action taken was to create the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution being an operational instrument operating at various levels with a view to assuming leadership in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts in the Continent. Indeed, beginning in the 1990 Africa undertook a number of bold steps not only in establishing a capacity for averting conflicts, but it also begun to foster a political culture of democratic governance, greater respect for human rights, as well promoting cooperation and integration among African states.

By the end of the 1990s, the score card for Africa was impressive compared to the previous period. Even though conflicts such as that of Darfur remain haunting us, and stability continue to be elusive, it is comforting that the frequency and spread of conflicts has diminished.

There is a new wave emerging in Africa; a wave and a re-awakening that builds on the developments and determination of the 1990s. Contrary to doomsayers on the 15th of September some 10 days ago Morgan Tsvangarai leader of the MDC in Zimbabwe and President Robert Mugabe signed an agreement to resolve their differences and to form an inclusive government. A few months earlier, a similar moment of pride for Africa was also witnessed in Kenya where President Kibaki and the leader of the Orange Democratic Movement agreed to form a government of a grand coalition. These are not insignificant events. They herald a new era in the Continent – one of compromise and reconciliation for the achieving the greater good. It is worthy to note these initiatives were all led internally by Africans – Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in the case of Kenya and President Thabo Mbeki with respect to Zimbabwe with the international community providing back-stopping support.

I referred earlier to the convergence of these two developments – the heightening of conflicts in the 1990s and the African resolve to end the scourge. There are all indications that we are beginning to see the light, because the bold steps that have been taken are increasingly showing results. The foundation for sustainable peace is being established in the continent. We have now celebrated, in a couple of incidences, our capacity in preventing devastating conflicts, including where necessary and appropriate the use of combined African Unity forces. At the same time the process of democratisation and good governance are gaining strength and momentum in the continent notwithstanding setbacks here and there. Democratic governance will further consolidate the building of enduring peace.

On the other hand, the events in Darfur, those in Somalia, as well as the continued conflict in Eastern Congo bring to the fore some critical factors that are incisive for your mission as ADF. From Lumumba's Congo of 1961, through the genocide in Rwanda of 1994, to today's tragedy in Darfur, the dynamics involved underscore the fact that these are not solely the preoccupation of African peoples and their governments. In their causality, in their perpetuation and exacerbation, as well as in their resolution and reconstruction they are part and parcel of the collective responsibility of the international community.

African people, their governments and continental organization are committed to stay in the frontline for achieving peace. However, they need and are entitled to international support. This support should be timely, genuine and meaningful because the experience of many of those cases has been one of disappointment, lip-service and plenty of symbolic gestures. Africans have made a commitment, they have marshaled a determination, availed their human power, but they lack the wherewithal. While having the capacity to contribute, often times the international community has not acted with the commensurate urgency and effectiveness.

As we view these developments in Africa, the important role of the African Diaspora is self evident. As Africans, you are at the interface of the continental challenges and as members of the Diaspora, you are closely connected and well positioned in the global arena. You have influence, you have power to change, and you have the capacity to act. These are valuable assets for Africa because other constituencies have used them effectively to promote their collective agenda.

Africa is in dire need of international support to complement its determined efforts to get rid of the scourge of conflict. You can be very helpful in this front by mobilizing for the provision of the required resources in a timely and effective manner. A few month ago, we in Tanzania hosted the Sullivan Summit which is a committed group of the Diaspora that is working with African people and governments in the various areas of development. In this regard, your Foundation can play a similar role in helping the harnessing of Africa's resources in a manner which fosters peace and security.

I commend your decision to pursue the area of peace education. It is badly needed, not only back in the continent, among communities and nations but even more critically among communities of your countries. Furthermore one particular area in which Foundations like yours can effectively assist is promoting an understanding of the realities, problems and challenges facing Africa. For quite often there is a tendency to generalize about the continent and worse still to present Africa as a continent of diseases, endless violence, poverty and endemic corruption; in brief a hopeless continent.

This type of presentation is partly due to sheer ignorance and partly due to prejudice. A better understanding of the continent is urgently called for. Africa is not a country. It is a continent of more than 50 independent states. It is a continent of diversity – multiracial, multiethnic, multicolour, multi religious and multicultural. Yes, we have our share of problems including conflicts wars, poverty, natural and man made disasters as well as pandemics such as HIV/AIDS. We have our Darfur and Somalia. But Africa is not all about conflicts, corruption and pandemics. Indeed the vast majority of African countries are peaceful and stable and many of which are undergoing significant political, economic and social transformation.

Chairperson, and distinguished participants, before I conclude let me briefly relate some personal reflections.

For more than thirty years, I have been in one way or another involved in developments in our continent. From freedom and liberation struggles, nation building, efforts at regional cooperation and integration, political and socioeconomic transformation; conflict resolution as well as the search for durable peace. As a young man I was involved in the independence movement. At the age of 22, I had the rare privilege of serving as my country's Ambassador to Cairo, Egypt.

Thereafter I served in a number of high profile diplomatic posts including New Delhi and Beijing as well as a ten year period at the United Nations in New York where among other things I was privileged to serve as Chairman of the UN committee decolonization and President of the UN General Assembly. During all this period I was intimately involved together with other African colleagues concerning developments in the continent.

Later as earlier stated I also served for an unprecedented three terms covering 12 years as Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union). During this period I had visited, in some cases, several times, almost all Africa countries. During these visits and in different forums I interacted with leaders of our countries as well as with different segments of the population including the civil society. I have recently served for three years as the African Union Special Envoy in the search for an end to the conflict in Darfur.

I have experienced memories of glory and gratification like the swearing in May 1994 of Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected President of South Africa. I have also witnessed moments of agony, shame and indescribable cruelty when I visited Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. I have been a witness to successes as well as distresses and disappointments. I have met with African leaders who were and are genuinely committed to serve their people. I have also met some who were more interested in self glorification and personal aggrandizement.

Clearly therefore I have seen many ups and downs. But one thing has been consistent. The resilience and determination of the African people for a better tomorrow through good governance, transparency, proper and fair utilization of the continent's immense resources. It is my conviction that notwithstanding the many problems and shortcomings that we face, Africa is on the right path for a better and even more challenging future. With good governance and genuine international cooperation Africa and its people, will rise to the great heights that they are entitled to. To achieve these objectives however peace, security, stability and the spirit of reconciliation must prevail.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by emphasizing that peace is not simply the absence of war. Thus on occasions like this we should celebrate all those who foster harmony, tolerance, inclusiveness, creativity, good governance, development and stability in our continent. Africa's contribution to world peace and development lies in nurturing its inherent strength and immense potential. We have embarked on that path. It can be done. We have all to play our part.

We shall overcome.